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HOUSEHOLD CALENDAR

The clothes moth - a \$200,000,000 pest

★ JUN 1936
U. S. Department of Agriculture

A dialogue between Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, and Mr. Morse Salisbury, Radio Service, delivered in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, broadcast by a network of 48 associate NBC radio stations, Thursday, May 21, 1936.

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SALISBURY:

The other evening when I was reading peacefully in the living room at home and somebody made a sudden dive after a moth as it fluttered on the edge of the circle of bright light, I was reminded that it was time for our annual program on clothes moths. So I called Miss Van Deman and she said she's had a lot of letters asking about that chemical with the seven syllable name that she and Dr. Back of the Bureau of Entomology talked about last year as one of the very best moth destroyers. And I happen to know that the Food and Drug Administration has exploded the claims of a lot of fake moth preventives. So Miss Van Deman and I are pooling information today to give you the latest scientific facts that the Department of Agriculture has to offer on preventing damage by clothes moths.

VAN DEMAN:

By the way, Morse, I saw quite a bill for damages brought against the moths of this country recently.

SALISBURY:

Did it run into millions?

VAN DEMAN:

Yes, hundreds of millions. An entomologist was quoted as estimating the annual damage from clothes moths in the United States at \$200,000,000. And he ended up by saying that "today a moth hole in a garment is usually the sign of a careless housekeeper."

SALISBURY:

Well, don't you agree with that?

VAN DEMAN:

Yes, I do. And what's more I promptly went home and took all my winter clothes out of the closet and proceeded to sun and air and clean them ready to pack away with plenty of paradichlorobenzene. The moths won't collect a penny of their two hundred million off me, not if I can help it.

SALISBURY:

Good. And I'm impressed by the way that word paradichlorobenzene comes trippingly from your tongue.

VAN DEMAN:

Oh that's easy, once you see it written out.

(over)

SALISBURY:

Does Doctor Back still place paradichlorobenzene at the top of the list of moth killers?

VAN DEMAN:

He puts it alongside of naphthalene flakes. Some people are willing to pay the higher price for the paradichlorobenzene because they find the odor less objectionable than that of naphthalene and it leaves the clothes more quickly when you take them out of storage in the fall.

The point that Doctor Back always emphasizes is that you have to use enough of these chemicals in a tight closet or container to make a concentrated gas. It's this heavier-than-air vapor that kills the moths. They don't object to the mere smell of these chemicals the way we humans do. So don't fool yourself into thinking that if you scatter enough of these flakes or crystals around to smell up the closet and then keep opening and shutting the door every day or two, you're protecting your clothes from moths. It takes more than that to kill a clothes moth. You need to keep the closet tightly closed, and you need about a pound of the crystals to each 100 cubic feet of space.

SALISBURY:

Did you ask Doctor Back about the moth-proofing sprays?

VAN DEMAN:

Yes, he said that some of these sprays are effective for a while if you use enough to dampen the fabric thoroughly. They're not permanent. He also said that the Department does not recommend any moth-proofing sprays that have arsenic in them. The arsenic has little value as ordinarily used in moth proofing, and it may irritate the skin when you wear the clothes again. And as for the kerosene-pyrethrum sprays often recommended for killing flies, they are no good against moths unless you actually hit them.

SALISBURY:

Then as far as moth killing goes, just squirting some of this liquid around here and there in a room is a waste of time?

VAN DEMAN:

Yes, and of money. Unless you have the kind of power sprayer that the professional exterminators use and can force the liquid into cracks and behind baseboards where it comes into direct contact with the moth millers or the eggs or larvae, these oil and pyrethrum sprays are of no use.

And Doctor Back doesn't recommend burning sulphur candles in the house to kill moths either. That is, in a nicely furnished house. By using two pounds of the candles to each 1000 cubic feet of space you may kill the moths, but the sulphur fumes are too hard on the furnishings.

Well, what did you find out from the Food and Drug people?

SALISBURY:

Quite a list of don'ts. During this last year they've examined over a hundred preparations for combating clothes moths, and they give this warning:

"Before you buy a preparation recommended to be used as a fumigant to prevent moth damage, examine the label and directions critically. Look upon the preparation with suspicion if it claims to be a repellent, if it claims to drive out clothes moths, if it does not recommend a definite dosage, and if its use is not restricted to tight containers."

They also recommend 100 percent sales resistance to preparations such as the one put out sometime ago by a manufacturer who claimed that his "Chloro-Crystals" would not only control moths, but also improve the health (of human beings, not moths), relieve hay fever, influenza, grip, nasal catarrh, asthma, and colds. The label claimed that the product would purify the air in waiting rooms, smoking rooms, hotels, and fish markets.

VAN DEMAN:

I saw a picture of a furbearing fish the other day. Maybe that moth concoction was intended for him.

SALISBURY:

Maybe so. Anyway a label like that goes to show you what far-fetched and ridiculous claims are sometimes made for moth killing preparations. Incidentally, the manufacturer of these crystals was fined \$100 for violation of the Insecticide Act.

VAN DEMAN:

There's one other bit of information Doctor Back gave me that I'd like to pass along. I asked him about the effect of dry cleaning on moths. Will it destroy the eggs as well as any live insects? He said yes, that if clothes are properly dry cleaned and put immediately into a box or bag so no moths flying around can infest them again, you can be sure they are free from moths.

SALISBURY:

Cleanliness before chemicals -- that's the slogan for fighting our enemy the clothes moth.

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